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SUBJECT: SENIOR ADVISOR MISENHEIMER,S MEETINGS IN THE
KURDISTAN REGION

Classified By: Senior Advisor Misenheimer For Northern Iraq for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador,s Senior Advisor for Northern Iraq, Alan Misenheimer, held a round of meetings in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah October 19-22. He met with the incoming and outgoing KRG Prime Ministers, the KRG Parliamentary leader, KDP and PUK officials, President Barzani,s Chief of Staff, the leader of the Goran (Change) movement, the heads of the two leading Islamist parties, and others. The electoral law for the January election, the situation in Ninewa and Kirkuk, and relations with neighboring countries dominated the conversations. KRG officials all rejected the idea of a pre-allocation of seats for Kirkuk province in the electoral law, arguing that it unfairly singled out Kirkuk and was undemocratic. The KRG officials believe this issue is an excuse for their opponents in the COR, whom the Kurds are convinced want no elections at all. The emergence of a newly strengthened opposition in the Kurdistan Region may be contributing to the Regional Government,s unwillingness to be perceived to be compromising on Kirkuk. End Summary.

Electoral Law:

¶2. (C) The Senior Advisor emphasized in all of his meetings the U.S. view that the overriding priority is that national elections be held on time in January, and that Kirkuk province be included. All the KRG interlocutors agreed. None of the KRG officials had any problems with the proposal to establish a committee to review voter rolls as long as voter rolls throughout Iraq are looked at and not just those in Kirkuk. KRG Presidency Chief of Staff Fuad Hussein said that having the elections in January benefits Kurds as well, since nothing is being done on other issues because GOI officials and politicians are consumed with the elections.

¶3. (C) However, KRG officials unanimously rejected the proposal to pre-allocate Kirkuk,s seats in the COR on the basis of ethnicity. Fuad Hussein also asked why there was no allocation for Christians. KRG PM-designate Dr. Barham Salih said that from a KRG point of view the Kurds are always asked to compromise, and that this proposal looks like it is not only giving special status to Kirkuk but that it is pre-determining Article 140. He and Fuad Hussein both said that if something like this is going to be done in Kirkuk, why can,t something similar be done in Mosul as well? Dr. Barham complained that the U.S. is asking Kurds to accept power sharing in Kirkuk, while the Kurds are being blocked from power in Ninewa despite a significant Kurdish population. In an October 22 follow-up meeting, Dr. Barham said that President Barzani had convoked a meeting of 22 political parties represented in the KRG and not a single party was willing to accept the idea of pre-allocation of seats in Kirkuk. The KRG parliament issued a statement to this effect, as well. Dr. Barham reported that at the meeting with political parties, President Barzani asked rhetorically

whether it would be better to make a stand now or wait until the GOI has tanks and F-16,s.

¶4. (C) Parliamentary leader Kamal Kirkuki said that to prevent a province from having an election was both corrupt and a violation of human rights. Director of Intelligence Masrur Barzani said that it would be an injustice if Kirkuk was not treated equally. Minister responsible for External Relations Falah Mustafa and others said that it is important for the KRG that Kirkuk not be singled out. He added that allocating seats through an agreed quota would not be democratic and would set a negative precedent. Fuad Hussein said that instead of solving one problem it would create three, in addition to creating an apartheid system. Goran Movement/Change List leader Nawsherwan Mustafa commented that Diyala, Ninewa and Baghdad also each have ethnically mixed populations.

Delaying Tactics:

¶5. (C) The Senior Advisor was repeatedly told that the various proposals for an electoral law "compromise" on Kirkuk were just a way for elements that either do not want the election to be held, or who would like it delayed, to put the blame on the Kurds. Fuad Hussein said that there are those in the COR who don,t want the elections because they don,t want to lose their jobs. He also said that Maliki wants to delay the election in order to strengthen his coalition. He added that, if tomorrow they agree about Kirkuk, then the next day those who want to delay will come up with a new

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problem. KDP Politburo Director Fadhil Mirani said that parliamentarians in the COR are not independent, with factions getting direction from Syria, Jordan, Iran, Turkey, or Saudia Arabia.

Open Versus Closed Lists:

¶6. (C) KRG Officials viewed the current COR debate over open versus closed lists as an issue of secondary importance to the KRG officials. Fuad Hussein and others said that they would agree to use the 2005 election law. Fadhil Mirani said that the KDP prefers a closed list because an open list will cause them to lose some voters. Outgoing KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani said that the Shia are worried because of the huge number of Shia entities registered for the election. He said that Sistani said that the lists should be open in order to get Shia to participate in the election. In Nechirvan,s opinion, with an open list it will be harder to fill the mandated 27% seats for women. Change List leader Nawsherwan Mustafa voiced his support for open lists in the January elections. He pointed out that previous closed list elections have led to the current situation, in which some governorates have virtually no representation in the Iraqi COR.

Need a Census:

¶7. (C) The KRGers were emphatic about the need to conduct a nationwide census. KRG Deputy PM-designate Azad Barwary said that the Iraqi Planning Committee had said that it was ready to conduct a census, but Maliki was the one who said that it couldn,t happen. He added that in the last two months 2 million new ration cards have been issued to non-existent people and that the food allocations are being sold to pay for weapons. In some areas there has been a 100% increase in the voting population, and that Arabic speaking Iranians have been given ration cards. Falah Mustafa said that without a census everyone talks about numbers but there

are no clear numbers on ethnic or religious populations.

Asayeesh:

18. (C) Several times the Senior Advisor suggested that the invisibility of the Asayeesh worked against Kurdish interests in Ninewa and Kirkuk by giving Arabs and Turkoman something that they could blame all sorts of unsubstantiated evils on. Barham Salih welcomed future U.S. help in training the Asayeesh and in supporting the merger of the PUK and KDP wings into a single organization. He characterized the Asayeesh and Peshmerga as part of the over all defense architecture of Iraq. He cautioned that restructuring the Asayeesh is a very sensitive subject. He emphasized that the U.S. should not get ahead of him on this, but allow him to develop the concept. Several interlocutors said the KDP and PUK arms of the Asayeesh needed to be merged. Masrur Barzani said that the hold-up was with the PUK side. Nawshirwan Mustafa scoffed at the idea that the KDP and PUK would ever merge their separate Asayeesh organizations.

Lack of Trust:

19. (C) KRG officials dismissed Turkoman and Arab fears that the Kurds are preparing to declare independence as ignoring how unrealistic it was, even if the Kurds wanted to do so. Masrur Barzani said that the Kurdish problem in regards to independence is not an economic one but a political one based on its geo-political situation. Note: Masrur,s analysis is at odds with the fact that the KRG,s economic lifeline is its share of revenues from the GOI. End note. He stated that adding Kirkuk will not change the situation as the Kurdistan Region would still be land-locked, and surrounded by often hostile neighbors. Masrur and others emphasized Qby often hostile neighbors. Masrur and others emphasized that the KRG knows it is completely unrealistic to even consider independence.

Opposition Views on KRG Politics:

110. (C) Nawsherwan Mustafa reiterated that Goran is in agreement with the KDP and PUK on Kurdish equities on national issues, but that Goran,s opposition to the KRG is over governance and administration of the KRG. He said that even though there has been the appearance of a PUK/KDP administration merge, in reality they are still separate. Regarding even low level government jobs the PUK still has a

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lock on those in Sulaimaniyah province and the KDP on those in Erbil and Dohuk. Anyone who is not a PUK/KDP supporter has no hope of working as a public official, even as a public school principal. Nawsherwan decried the lack of KRG budget transparency. He said that both the KDP and PUK take \$35 million each off the top of the KRG general budget every month for their own private purposes, including giving money to smaller parties to buy their support. The KDP and PUK try hard to maintain a coalition in the government to prevent criticism and minimize questions about contents of the budget. Regarding recent allegations of corruption facing Sulaimaniyah governor Dana Majeed, Nawshirwan said that the governor would resign over the mistrust created from the investigation, even though the investigation did not find a smoking gun.

111. (C) The two leading Islamic parties had similar sentiments. Salahadin Bahadin, leader of the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) confirmed that his party would remain in opposition. Note: Press reports and other KIU contacts say that the KIU was divided over whether to participate in government. End Note. Ali Bapir, Amir, of the Kurdistan Islamic Group (KIG) had a list of criticisms for KDP/PUK leadership including lack of budget transparency, arbitrary

arrests, lack of timely trials, and party membership determining job opportunities. He said he had submitted a list of conditions, focusing on anti-corruption and human rights, for his party to join the government. Deputy PM-designate Azad Barwary and Fuad Hussein later said that Bapir had also asked for control of several municipalities, a commitment that laws would not be in conflict with Sharia and even separate schools for boys and girls. Fuad and Barwary told us the KRG had rejected Bapir's conditions and the KIG would not be included in the government.

Ninewa:

¶12. (C) Nawsherwan Mustafa said that the Kurds need to work to rebuild relationships with the Arab communities of Ninewa.

Sady Pira, Head of Public Relations for the PUK, who assisted the CPA in governing Mosul, said that he had repeatedly recommended that the KDP change their representatives in Ninewa, because the current KDP leadership is making things worse. He specifically criticized Khisro Goran as mishandling the situation, particularly in dealing with tribal leaders. Salahadin Bahadin, Secretary of the Kurdistan Islamic Union said that KDP leadership in Mosul was heavy-handed, adding that breaking the law may work in the short term but not forever. Masrur Barzani said that the current government in Mosul is working with terrorists who are bringing foreign fighters to Iraq through Syria. Masrur and Council of Ministers Chief of Staff Nouri Sinjari said the Najafy brothers are Arabized Turkmen whose grandfather wrote a letter in support of Turkey retaining Mosul province in the 1920s. More recently, Masrur said the Najafys made their fortunes as providers of horses to Uday and Qusay and had strong ties to Baathists. Regarding Sheikh Abdallah, Masrur said there were other, more moderate Sheiks in the Shammari tribe but that Abdallah is trying to use the Americans to help him dominate the tribe.

Kirkuk:

¶13. (C) Several KRG officials derided Arab and Turkmen accusations that Kurds from Turkey or Iran had moved to Kirkuk, noting that the difference in dialects would make these people easily detectable. Masrur said the KRG had difficulty encouraging even former Kirkuki Kurds to return, because of the relatively better conditions in the KR. Qbecause of the relatively better conditions in the KR. Referring to Article 140, Peshmerga Minister Shaikh Jafar stressed that if all parties moved forward following the constitution, all difficulties would be resolved, including the mosaic of security forces in Kirkuk. He said that 'the other side' claims that the Asayeesh causes all the problems in Kirkuk. He proposed that an investigation committee be formed to look into the truth of these claims. He said that reconciliation could be achieved with all parties at the table.

¶14. (C) Shaikh Jafar expressed concern about the proposal to deploy the Iraqi Army to Hawija, especially under the leadership of General Abdul Amir, who participated in the Anfal campaign. Jafar suspected that if Abdul Amir deploys his troops as far as Hawija, his real intent will be to enter Kirkuk, and it will undermine the authority of the police.

¶15. (C) Nawsherwan Mustafa proposed that Kirkuk have multiple

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constituencies to allow citizens to choose the local representative they want. Several KRG officials said that the KRG is not trying to take control of Hawija sub-district and that the Kurds would accept Hawija being attached to Salah ad Din province. Speaking of the DIBs in general, Nawsherwan admitted that the Kurds had made mistakes when initially setting up administrative bodies in Ninewa, Kirkuk

and Diyala that repelled the Turkomen and Arab communities rather than attracting them.

Turkey and Iran:

¶16. (C) Nechirvan Barzani said that the KRG has been careful to maintain a low profile in ongoing discussions with Turkey which has resulted in much improved relations. He added that they have worked hard to build confidence and that the KRG has bent over backwards to encourage Turkish firms to come to the KRG. Nechirvan revealed that the KRG had been an active but behind-the-scenes facilitator of the recent return of PKK members to Turkey. He said that the KRG had been communicating with the PKK on the issue, with Turkey's full knowledge. He said that the KRG talks not only with ruling party officials but also with the Turkish intelligence organization (MIT) and military officials. Further, he said that in the past the Iranians have actively fed misinformation about the Kurds to Turkey, but Turkey has now stopped listening to them. The improved relationship between the KRG and Turkey has made Iran unhappy. Shaikh Jafar requested U.S. assistance in putting pressure on the Iranians to cease shelling the border areas. Falah Mustafa said that the KRG would like U.S. help to bring them closer to Turkey. On the subject of Iran however, he said that they are much more difficult.

Vision for the Future:

¶17. (C) Falah Mustafa said that Iraq needs a real national reconciliation that includes everyone, where every group believes that they can live together. He said that the Kurds recognize that compromise is needed, but it should be compromise and not concession. He further said that the majority should make assurances to the others that 'this is an Iraq for everyone.' He said that the KRG want people in government who believe in 'Iraqiness' and are loyal to Iraq instead of Iran, Syria, and others. To help with building trust he said that the KRG would like to have cross-ministry meetings, as well as hosting trainings and conferences to bring people to the Kurdistan Region. Nechirvan said that in Baghdad there is no vision for the future. Describing a private sector investment into power generation for the Kurdistan Region, Nechirvan said that Baghdad was against the project from the beginning telling the Kurds that they would fail. Nechirvan said that the region has now gone from 3 hours to 22 hours of electricity a day thanks to foreign private sector investment. He added that they would like provincial councils from all over Iraq to come to the Kurdistan Region to see what is possible.

Comment:

¶18. (C) Despite political differences among themselves, it was clear throughout all of the meetings that the Kurds are very much on the same page in rejecting special treatment for Kirkuk in the election law. The emergence of a significant opposition in the KR in the July elections and fears about the opposition role in the January elections may be constricting Kurdish leaders, room for maneuver on the election law issue. With Kurdish popular opinion sensitive about possible concessions relating to Kirkuk, the KDP and PUK leaders are reluctant to hand the opposition an issue. QPUK leaders are reluctant to hand the opposition an issue.

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